

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama Says U.S. Preparing Response to Libyan Violence

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama says it is imperative that the world speak “with one voice” to condemn the suppression of peaceful demonstrators in Libya and to support their universal rights, and adds that the administration is preparing “a full range of options” that the United States can take unilaterally and multilaterally in response to the ongoing violence.

Speaking at the White House February 23, Obama said the Libyan government has a responsibility to refrain from violence, allow humanitarian assistance to reach those in need and respect the rights of the Libyan people.

“It must be held accountable for its failure to meet those responsibilities and face the cost of continued violations of human rights,” he said.

“I have also asked my administration to prepare the full range of options that we have to respond to this crisis. This includes those actions we may take and those we will coordinate with our allies and partners, or those that we’ll carry out through multilateral institutions,” the president said.

Obama said Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton will be meeting with her counterparts on the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva on February 28, and Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns will continue to hold discussions in the region on Libya and other areas of unrest in the Middle East and North Africa.

According to press reports, after a week of protests, as many as 300 people have been killed in recent clashes between anti-government protesters and security forces loyal to Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi.

Obama said the bloodshed, threats and orders to shoot peaceful protesters in Libya are outrageous and unacceptable. “These actions violate international norms and every standard of common decency,” he said.

The United States strongly supports the universal rights of Libyans and all people to enjoy the freedoms of peaceful assembly, free speech and the ability to determine their own destiny, Obama said.

“These are human rights. They are not negotiable. They must be respected in every country and they cannot be denied through violence or suppression,” Obama said.

“The change that is taking place across the region is being

driven by the people of the region. This change doesn’t represent the work of the United States or any foreign power. It represents the aspirations of people who are seeking a better life,” he said.

The most basic human aspirations are driving the current unrest in the Middle East and North Africa, Obama said. Throughout the current time of transition, the United States will continue to stand up for freedom, justice and “the dignity of all people,” he added.

Secretary Clinton said February 23 that “this is now the moment for the international community to act together” in response to the situation in Libya.

“Everything will be on the table. We will look at all the possible options to try to bring an end to the violence, to try to influence the government,” she said.

State Department spokesman Philip J. Crowley told reporters February 23 that the Obama administration is considering “a full range of tools and options,” including “sanctions that could be imposed, either bilaterally or multilaterally,” as well as the possibility of freezing the financial assets of Libyan leaders in response to the violence.

Asked why the Obama administration has not yet taken action in response to the violence, Crowley said that many of the steps that the United States is contemplating will “require some preparation,” such as legal and executive orders, and will need to have “a standard of due diligence” in order to have support.

Crowley also said that it is not up to the United States or any other power to “dictate who should rule or not rule a particular country.”

“Who leads Libya is a matter between the government and the Libyan people,” he said. The Obama administration is continuing to encourage political, social and economic reform in Libya and other countries in the Middle East, to allow all people in the region the ability to participate in a free, fair and transparent political process.

“They are the ones who ultimately will make the decisions as to ... who are their rulers, who are their legislators and what the policies of their country should be,” he said.

U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL CONDEMNS VIOLENCE IN LIBYA

The United Nations Security Council discussed the situation in Libya on February 22 and issued a presidential statement that condemns the use of violence against Libyan civilians and urges the Libyan government

to immediately take steps to “address the legitimate demands of the population, including through national dialogue.”

The Libyan government has a responsibility to protect its population, the Security Council said and called on authorities to “act with restraint, to respect human rights and international humanitarian law and to allow immediate access for international human rights monitors and humanitarian agencies,” including ensuring the safe passage of humanitarian and medical supplies, as well as humanitarian workers, to help address reported shortages in Libya.

Libya must also “respect the freedom of peaceful assembly and of expression, including freedom of the press,” the Security Council said, as it called for “the immediate lifting of restrictions on all forms of the media.”

The Security Council statement also stressed “the importance of accountability,” with the “need to hold to account those responsible for attacks, including by forces under their control, on civilians.”

Ambassador Rosemary DiCarlo, the deputy U.S. representative to the United Nations, expressed strong U.S. support for the Security Council statement. In remarks after the statement was issued, she said she hopes that it “will help bring an immediate end to this unacceptable situation.”

“The international community has said in one clear and unified voice that it condemns the violence against civilians in Libya, that the violence must cease immediately and that the government of Libya must exercise restraint and protect the rights of its people,” DiCarlo said, adding that the United States will continue to “stand up in support of the legitimate aspirations and universal rights of people everywhere.”

U.S. Designates Iranian Officials for Human Rights Abuses

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — The U.S. State and Treasury departments have announced the designation of two Iranian officials for “serious human rights abuses in Iran.”

Abbas Jafari Dolatabadi and Mohammed Reza Naqdi are “two of the most egregious perpetrators of human rights abuses,” State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said at the department’s daily news briefing February 23. The two are now subject to asset freezes and a visa ban, including a block on any transactions with people in the United States.

Adam Szubin, director of Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control, commended the designations in a statement February 23, saying Dolatabadi and Naqdi “have no place in the international financial system.”

Assistant Secretary of State Michael Posner also praised the designations February 23.

“Today’s decision underscores our enduring commitment to support Iranians seeking to exercise their universal rights and expresses our solidarity with victims of torture, persecution and arbitrary detention,” he said in a joint statement from the departments of State and Treasury.

The statement said Dolatabadi and Naqdi have been “responsible for, or complicit in, serious human rights abuses in Iran since the June 2009 disputed presidential election.”

Crowley said Dolatabadi, who was appointed prosecutor-general of Tehran in August 2009, has “prosecuted Iranians for exercising their right to freedom of expression and freedom of religion, and in many cases sought and won the death penalty against individuals who were simply exercising their right to peaceful assembly.” The statement said Dolatabadi’s office “has also targeted and arrested reformists, human rights activists and members of the media as part of a broad crackdown on the political opposition.”

The statement said Naqdi has commanded the Basij militia since October 2009. Crowley said that under Naqdi’s command, the Basij has engaged in a “string of actions ... taken to suppress dissent and in many cases violently.” The forces were responsible for the violent response to the December 2009 Ashura Day protests, which resulted in as many as 15 deaths and the arrests of hundreds of protesters.

The designations were made under an executive order signed by President Obama in September 2010 “to provide the United States with new tools” targeting human rights abusers in the Iranian government, the statement said.

United States Supports New Zealand in Quake Aftermath

By Charlene Porter
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama has conveyed the condolences of his family and the United States to the people of New Zealand affected by a second major earthquake in just six months.

The February 22 earthquake struck the city of Christchurch and is already ranking among the Pacific

nation's worst disasters, as calculated by the New Zealand Herald. The death toll for the quake currently stands at 75 and is expected to increase, with about 300 people still reported missing.

The newspaper also reports that about 80 percent of the city is without water, while utilities have been able to restore electricity to about 60 percent of the affected area. The power outages are also limiting the cell phone networks. While carriers are attempting to restore service, they ask that people outside New Zealand use text messages to contact their New Zealand friends, family and associates.

The magnitude 6.3 earthquake is considered an aftershock of a magnitude 7.1 temblor that occurred last year. The February 22 disaster is causing greater damage because it occurred right beneath the city of Christchurch at a lesser depth than the September 2010 event, dubbed the Darfield quake, which had an epicenter about 40 kilometers from the city, according to GeoNet, a scientific project operating a hazard monitoring system for New Zealand.

Obama said the United States is deploying a disaster assistance response team from the U.S. Agency for International Development and an urban search-and-rescue team from Los Angeles, one of the country's most experienced post-quake responders.

"As our New Zealand friends move forward," the president said, "may they find some comfort and strength in knowing that they will have the enduring friendship and support of many partners around the world, including the United States."

The urban search-and-rescue team from the Los Angeles County Fire Department will be taking more than 70 specialized personnel and necessary equipment to rescue those trapped in the unstable rubble of a quake site.

New Zealand's Foreign Ministry reports that search-and-rescue teams from Taiwan, Singapore and the United Kingdom are also expected to be on the scene by February 24.

A delegation from the U.S. Congress was in Christchurch for discussions on partnerships between the two nations, but left mere hours before the quake hit. Representative Don Manzullo, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, called the event a "devastating tragedy" and expressed the concerns of the group.

"Having received the warm reception of the people of Christchurch at the Partnership Forum only hours before the earthquake struck makes this disaster all the more

personal and poignant," said the Republican lawmaker.

Another American in Christchurch at the time of the quake is a deputy administrator of the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency, Timothy Manning, who was in meetings with New Zealand counterparts about emergency preparedness and management. The meeting participants were unhurt in the quake.

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